# Three Important Precepts

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JUNE 22, 1890

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"Hear you, my son, and be wise, and guide your heart in the way." Proverbs 23:19.

THE words are very direct and personal—and that is what I wish my sermon to be. My soul is more and more set upon immediate conversions. I have no voice with which to play the orator—I have only enough strength to be an earnest pleader with your souls. I want to come to close quarters with you and to plead with each man and woman here as if there were but one. Specially would I press my entreaties upon the young, that they may immediately begin that blessed walk which will lead them to the right hand of God. Here and now I desire your salvation! I may never preach again and you may never hear me again. "Now is the accepted time."

Solomon, in this verse, gave forth three precepts. I am not very careful as to what limited meaning he personally attached to his words. I am going to baptize his precepts into the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. I shall put into them a fullness of Gospel meaning and I shall press them home upon the heart, praying the Holy Spirit to lead every unconverted person to whom these words shall come to obey these three precepts at once. My voice is to each one. I think I have a message from God for you. Be not disobedient to the heavenly summons. The first precept in my text is, "Hear." The second is, "Be wise" and the third is, "Guideyours heart in the way."

I. We will begin with the first precept, which is contained in the word, "HEAR." Perhaps you will say, "We are all here ready to hear and do not, therefore, need the exhortation." That you are in this great audience-chamber in the posture of attention is a matter in which I rejoice. So far, so good. But let me say to you this exhortation to hear is not only given in this verse, but it is often repeated in Holy Scripture. "Hear, O Israel!" is the voice of the Law and of the Prophets.

This is not optional—it is a matter of command and promise. "Incline your ear, and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live." "Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat you that which is good." The very existence of a Revelation is a call to hear it. You cannot find eternal life through the eyes of the body. No actual bronze serpent is to be looked upon. You need not now look for solemn ceremonies, bleeding sacrifices and smoking incense. These shadows have vanished. The high road of the Truth of God to the heart runs through the ear. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." The Apostolic word is, "Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken unto me."

The exhortation to hear is a very important one. As I understand it and use it at this time it means, hear the Gospel. "Take heed what you hear." There is only one way of salvation. Mind that you hear the one and only Gospel! Be very careful of your Sundays—you will not have many of them. Do not go on the Sabbath to hear whatever comes in your way, or you may hear to your ruin. Go to hear the Gospel. "How shall I know where the Gospel is preached?" Well, you will not have to enquire long—you may readily judge for yourself. Unless the name of Jesus is sounded out often, depend upon it, you are in the wrong place. Unless you hear the words, "Grace," "faith," "salvation," you may conclude that you are not on Gospel ground.

It is true that mere terms may not always be a sufficient guide, but, as a rule, as straws show which way the wind blows, so will these terms, by their presence or absence, be a guide to you. It will not take you long to find out whether the man preaches of works or of Grace, ceremonies or faith, man or Christ. You can soon discover the Gospel sermon or the moral essay, for the very temperature of them differs. Mere morality teaches men to dance, but it does not discern the fact that they have lost their legs. The Gospel gives the lame man his feet and then shows him how to use them. You need

a Savior—you do not want to be deluded with some theory of saving yourself. Go where you hear about the Lord Jesus and His redeeming blood. If you hear no mention of "the blood," clear out of the place and never go again.

When you have found the Gospel-house, take care that you hear with the view of obtaining faith in the Lord Jesus. Aim at that blessed thing. "Faith comes by hearing." It will be idle for you to stop at home and say, "I will try to believe." This is unreasonable and not according to the laws of mind. It is folly to attempt to try to believe—there is a far better way. Go and listen to what it is which you are to believe and, as you hear it, if it is faithfully proclaimed and if the preacher is, in his own person, a witness to the Truth, you will be greatly helped in the matter of believing. Faith comes from knowledge and evidence—and hearing brings you these. Besides, there is a power about the Gospel which tends to create faith—and the Holy Spirit is pleased to use the foolishness of preaching to breed faith—and so to save them that believe.

If the Gospel is allowed to work in its own way, the most unbelieving mind will soon yield itself to faith. The persons who do not believe the Bible, as a rule, have never read it. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, as a rule, know nothing about Him while, for certain, those who know His Gospel best find it easy to believe. A frequent hearer is likely to become a fervent Believer. Do not fall into the error of some who only patronize the house of God occasionally and think they are doing something very meritorious. If you are often hearing with an earnest mind you will not fail to get the blessing. He that only eats once a month will not grow very strong. He that only hears the Gospel now and then is not

likely to be profited. Beware of hearing sermons as a pastime—this is no trifling matter. Hear the Gospel with the view of being saved by it.

Next, hear without prejudice. The Word of God does not please some people. That is not at all amazing for many people ought not to be pleased. Some have a preconceived idea of what the plan of salvation ought to be. They are in no humor to receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save their souls. Their objective is to find fault with the preacher, to pick a hole in his doctrine or in his manner. They must have something or other to criticize or censure. Do you wonder that such folks are not profited? They do not hear, but they sit in judgment. I have read that in the reign of Queen Elizabeth there was a law made that everybody should go to his parish church, but many sincere Romanists loathed to go and hear Protestant doctrine. Through fear of persecution they attended the parish church—but they took care to fill their ears with wool so that they should not hear what their priests condemned.

It is wretched work preaching to a congregation whose ears are stopped with prejudices! Are there not many such? The world, the flesh, the devil, the priests, the skeptics and the down-graders have stopped their ears and what good is likely to come of their attendance? If you come to carp at everything, how are you likely to be blessed? Hear! Hear! Hear what God the Lord will speak and there will be a message of peace for your soul. I would say, like the old pleader, "Strike, but hear!" Abuse me, but hear me! Do not shut the door of mercy against yourself.

Next, I would say, hear for yourself. The great object of a hearer should be to hear what God speaks to him. I am glad that God should speak to my neighbor, but my neighbor must listen for himself and not for me. The Roman orator began—

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." He needs the loan, for people usually lend their ears to one another and not to the speaker. They will sit and wonder what Mrs. So-and-So thinks of the sermon. Leave her alone, Friend! Think about what is good for yourself. Do you not know that in every sermon there is something for yourself and your first duty is to give heed to that which is for you? Come with me to a house. A will is to be read. A dozen people have come home from the funeral and they are going to hear the will read. Perhaps they cried a good deal at the funeral, but they will not cry now if the person they have buried has left a decent sum among them.

They are all ears for what the lawyer has to read. They want to hear that will much more than many want to hear a sermon! See how they listen! There are long, ugly words about tenements and hereditaments, and this, and that, and the other—but they set themselves to hear it all as much as if it were a choice poem. Are they going to sleep? By no means! John Smith over yonder, the man's brother—look how he doubles his attention at a certain point! As for the eldest son, how eagerly he drinks in about all the farm and stock and freehold land, and such like, all in the parish of A, in the county of B! It takes a long time to go through

it, but each legatee loves every word which relates to him. He listens and his ears seem to grow longer while he hears!

That poor relative who gets 19 guineas lays the codicil to heart and can almost repeat it word for word, only wishing it had been 500 pounds! John Smith does not care so much about the rest of the document. In fact, he hopes there are not many more items. The extract which relates to himself he would like to copy out. Will you be wise enough to treat a sermon in that fashion? Please listen to that which concerns you most, take it down and carry it home. This is the exhortation of the text—"Hear"—but especially hear that which has most to do with you, whether it is rebuke, or promise, or command.

And then, dear Friends, hear when the sermon is done. "How can I hear when it is all done?" This is a very important point. I went to see a poor woman in the hospital one day and she said to me, speaking of the sermons she had heard, "Sir, you seem to talk to me all day and all night while I am lying here." I said, "Well, I hope I do not keep you awake." "No," she said, "but as I am awake I hear you talking to me through everything I see. You have used so many things as illustrations that everywhere I am I have you in my memory." I was pleased, and inwardly wished that I could always preach in the way which she described—and I should do so if I always had hearers such as that sick woman had evidently been.

Ah, dear Friends! The way to hear a sermon is to hear it when you get home. Pray remember the Scripture verse in my sermon of this morning, "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." ["All the Day Long," No. 2150.] I want you to hear that word when you are dressing tomorrow, when you are taking down the shutters, when you are dealing across the counter and when you are among the children. If you are tempted to do a dishonest deed, I would have you hear a still small voice saying to you, "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." A sermon ought to be like a musical box—we wind it up when we preach it—and then it goes on playing till its tune is through. It should be said of a good sermon, "It being ended still speaks." Hear what you hear in such a way that it shall be like a seed which will grow in the garden of your heart.

Above all, hear the Gospel as the voice of God. When a man hears the preacher, not as a man speaking on his own account but as God's servant—and when the Truth spoken is not measured by its oratory, nor weighed by its logic, but is judged of by the Bible as to whether it is the very Truth of God or not—then it is that men hear to profit. Those who compare sermons with Scripture are noble, like the Bereans of old. If you can say, "I hear the word, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God," it will have its effect upon your heart. Oh, that the word may come to you with demonstration of the Spirit! You will never lose the good effect of Gospel preaching if the Spirit of God seals it on your mind!

Is it so, or not? Do you come here to listen to me? Yours is a poor errand. If you come to listen to what God the Lord shall speak, however poorly I may interpret His mind as I find it in the Scripture, yet you will find a blessing in what you hear! A good many things

are sold nowadays by means of pretty wrappings and in the same way worthless doctrines are spread by the fine style in which they are done up. But as you do not want the wrappings, but the goods, so in sermons the manner is not the main concern. If we should set a thing before you with all the grandeur of oratory and it did not come from God, it would be a gaudy nothing!

Though we spoke falsehood with the tongues of men and of angels, we should not be so good as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. But though we give you the Gospel of the blessed God in great feebleness and trembling, yet it is what you need and through it the blessing will come to you. He that has an ear towards God will find that God has an ear towards him. Thus have we dwelt upon the first exhortation. Hear often. Hear the Gospel! Hear for yourself. Hear attentively. Hear with a holy purpose. Hear the Gospel as a message from God.

II. The next precept is, "BE WISE." What does that mean in this connection? It means, first, try to understand what you hear. Get to the bottom of it. Look it up; look it down; look it through. Look over it but do not overlook it. When you have heard the words of the Gospel, say to yourself, "I want to know what this Gospel is. With the ins and outs of it I am going to make myself acquainted, if the Lord will teach me. I will know what I must do to be saved and why I must do it and how it will save me."

How much I wish that a sacred curiosity would seize upon my hearers so that they would say, "We must know the soul and spirit of this Word of the Lord. We want to know, each one for himself, who the Savior is and how He can be ours!" God give you thus to be wise by getting an understanding of the Gospel! I should not wonder, if I were to come round the congregation, if I found many here who do not know the Gospel, simple as it is. I will not come round, so do

not be frightened—but I sadly fear that some of you who have been for years to places of worship are still ignorant of the elements of the faith. Should it be so? Do try to know saving Truth. Whatever else you do not learn, do learn the answer to that question, "What must I do to be saved?"

"Be wise"—that is, believe the Gospel as it comes from God. You will not be wise to doubt it, but you will be wise to believe it, for it is true and sure. This is an age of doubt—it is in the air. No man is, nowadays, thought to have any sense if he does not doubt even the best established truths—and yet I do not think that it takes any great quantity of brain to be a doubter! With a very strong effort I might manage to doubt—to doubt my father's word (I have never done it, mark you)! To doubt my brother's faithfulness. To doubt my wife's love to me. By such efforts I should doubt myself into an abyss of misery and should become a glorious fool! To turn the power of doubting upon spiritual realities would be even more fatal—for that would take away my hope beyond the grave and plunge me in despair.

Doubt is sterile—it produces nothing—it destroys, but it cannot create. I have long been a Believer and I find that my joys all come to me by the road of believing and none of them by the wretched lane of doubting. I have believed this Bible to be God's Word and after all the destructive criticism which I have heard, I still believe it! I have believed Christ to be my Savior and after all the doubts of His Deity and Atonement lately vented and invented, I still believe it! Yes, and believe it none the less. I have believed God to be my Father and though I have seen His Fatherhood dragged in the mire, I still believe it. I believe Heaven to be my home—despite the insinuations of Satan I still believe it. I have never yet gained health, joy, comfort, holiness through doubting. No, I have never gained a piece of bread, or a drop of water through doubting. So many are doing the doubting and doing it very completely, that I need not trouble myself to assist them, but may quietly go on believing and enjoying the sweet results of faith. Our experience proves that it is wisdom to believe the Lord! He is God that cannot lie! Why should we doubt Him?

"Be wise"—that is, be affected by what you have heard. Yield your heart up to the Word of God. Some people are hard to move—they are more like stone than flesh. There are congregations where you may preach your own heart out but you cannot get at their hearts. You might as well preach to the statues in St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey as preach to them—they are impenetrable and immovable. He that is wise permits the Truth to come into full contact with him. Be wise, my Hearer! Yield yourself up to the Truth of God, for it will do you good and no harm. Do not resist it! Do not evade it! Let the heavenly wind blow on you, for it brings healing. If it bids you hate sin, hate sin. If it bids you repent, repent. If it entreats you to believe, believe. Be what the Gospel is meant to make you. You cannot make yourself a saint, but the Holy Spirit can do it through the Word of Truth.

And then take care that you do not wander into evil company. You say, "Surely you are leaving your text. Why bring that in?" Solomon brought it in. "Hear you, my son, and be wise. Be not among winebibbers, among riotous eaters of flesh" and so on. If you are wise you will keep out of bad company, especially out of the society of revelers, drunkards and gluttons. This warning may be very necessary to some to whom this sermon will come. You have lately come from the country to this wicked city. I am sure that you must be very sorry to have come to this horrible wilderness of bricks and mortar. Oh, for an hour or two of the green fields and the leafy woods and the blue sky!

Alas, designing persons are surrounding you—they are trying to draw you into evil. Be wise. "If sinners entice you, consent you not." Be wise. Keep out of the way of their enticements. In ten years' time, if you have gone into evil company in the interval, you will be, yourself, the best witness of how unwise you have been! And if you are kept out of it, kept especially from the wine cup and vice, I am sure you will thank God that you were wise in time. Choose good companions. Make saints your friends. Trust the true and good and quit the gay and frivolous.

Once more, "Be wise," that is, take care to do what you hear. Have you ever seen persons crowding into a place of worship? Do they not, in this place, often press upon one another to hear the Word of God? Yes, yes and when they have come and they have heard it, what have they done with it? The great mass of them have done nothing with it! Did you ever go to a physician? Did you ever wait in the room for an hour or two before your turn came to see the great man? Did you give him your guinea? Did he hand you a prescription? Tell me, did you leave it on the table? Did you fold it up carefully and put it into your pocket? Did you keep it there? Did you not have the medicine made up? Did you not take

it?

Suppose that in a month's time someone should say, "Did you see the doctor?" You say, "Yes, I went to see him." "Did you have a prescription?" "He gave me a bit of paper with something or other upon it, but I do not know what it

was, for I cannot read Latin." "You do not mean to say that you have not had it made up at the chemist's?" "No," you say, "I was satisfied with seeing the doctor." Dear Friends, you smile at this description of folly, for it is such gross stupidity. Be wise, then—do not hear the Gospel in vain by neglecting its commands! If you know how to be saved, obey the command! Do not be lost in darkness with light shining upon your eyeballs! Do not go to Hell with the gate of Heaven standing open before you.

I pray you, hear and be wise. Turn what you hear into speedy practice. God help you to do so, for His mercy's sake! I am talking to you in a very feeble and commonplace manner, but what more could I say if I had the eloquence of the greatest orator? What better could I do than in a loving and brotherly manner plead with every one of you not to play the fool with your souls? Hear the Gospel, but be not hearers only! Be wise enough to be diligent in practicing what you are taught. Believe in Jesus unto life eternal! May the good Spirit make you wise unto salvation! Why will you perish? Why run risks with your never-dying soul? Come, now, and seek the Lord. If you seek Him, He will be found of you.

III. Now comes the last of the three precepts. "GUIDE YOUR HEART IN THE WAY." There is but one way. "In the way." That is to say, in the way of wisdom and this is one, and one only. There are not two Gods, but one God. There are not two Christs, but one Christ. There are not two gospels, but one Gospel. There are not two heavens, but one Heaven and there are not two ways of life, but one way. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" and one Holy Spirit, and one life by His indwelling—and there is no going to Heaven by any but the one way!

Some people get comparing the different ways of salvation. This is frivolous and foolish, for he that preaches any other than the one Gospel is accursed! Suppose a man wants to go to York and he says, "Well, I want to go to York, but the road to London is a better road and a wider road." What matters the character of the road if it does not lead where you want to go? You say you want to go to York—then what have you to do with any road but that

which leads to York? There are many ways, but what have you to do with any but the way everlasting? There is one royal road which leads to God and eternal life and Heaven. Never mind what the other ways are, or are not—you go the right way!

When I go from this place, I want to go home to Norwood. The road down the Borough is level, but my road home is up a very steep hill to Norwood. Suppose I were to say, "I shall take the level road and cross London Bridge, and drive into the county of Essex"—what then? Why, I shall not get home if I take any other road than that which leads to the top of Norwood Hill. If it is steep, I cannot help it, but I must say, with John Bunyan at the Hill Difficulty, "This hill, though high, I covet to ascend."

So with you, dear Friend. There is only one road to Heaven. And although there are a dozen roads which do not lead to holiness and God, it is idle to raise them up, for they will not serve your turn. Take the hilly road of Self-Denial. Climb up to Heaven on your hands and knees if it must be, but make up your mind that you are going there by God's way. That way is often described in the Scriptures. Shall I tell you what the Bible says about this way? Well, it calls it the way of the Lord and you are not in the right way unless you walk with God day by day. A religion that has not God in it is irreligion. Atheism cannot bring you to Heaven nor can any form of deism, even though it is baptized into the name of Christianity. If God is not Chief, Head, King, Lord, Sovereign—you are not on the right road.

It is Christ's way, too, for Christ says, "I am the Way." You are not on the right way unless Christ is first and last with you. His precious blood to put away your sin, His glorious Resurrection to be your justification, His Ascension to Heaven to take possession of a place for you, His second coming to receive you to Himself—all these are the way. Christ is All in All to the man who is on the right road. Sometimes it is called the way offaith. That is the only way to Heaven. The way of works might have taken us to Heaven if we had not fallen in Adam and had never sinned on our own account—but having been once defiled by iniquity we cannot be saved by future innocence. Do what we may, we cannot mend the life which we have marred—the flaws and fractures will appear.

Justice will demand punishment for past transgressions—"The soul that sins, it shall die." We must be saved by Divine Grace through faith, as it is written, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." The way of faith is the way to Glory! This way is also called the way of Truth. If your religion is based on a lie, it must deceive and ruin you. If it is founded on the Truth of God, it will truly save you and nothing else will. Alas, for many—the way of truth they have not known. Many hate the Truth of God and go about with a thousand inventions to get rid of it. If you love Truth and follow it and believe in it as God has revealed it in the Person of His Son, all is well with your soul!

It is also called the way of holiness. My dear Hearer, are you in that way? This is the King's highway and it leads to the city of the great King. Do you hate sin? Do you follow after righteousness? Would you scorn a lie? Do you keep your word even when it is to your

personal loss? Do you endeavor to act fairly to your workmen, kindly to your servants, faithfully to your masters, uprightly to all? When you feel that you have erred, are you humbled and grieved? Do you endeavor for the future to guard the point in which experience has proved you to be weak? Do you watch against temptation and daily cry to God for strength to overcome it? Depend upon it, he that would be happy hereafter must be holy now!

The road to Heaven is also called the "way of peace." We must seek after peace of conscience, peace with God, peace with our fellow men. If our end is to be peace, our way must be peace—a quiet, contented mind is a thing to cultivate. Keep in this way! Let me tell you two or three more things which the Bible says about this way. It is the "old" way. It bids us ask for the old paths. True religion is no new thing. Your mother was saved—you do not doubt it. Be saved in the way which led your mother safely. If there might be a new way, I would not try it—one cannot afford to play experiments with the only soul he has! That which has saved those who have gone before us is quite good enough for me. I love to think of friends in Glory—their footprints cheer me! I love—

"The way the holy Prophets went, The road that leads from banishment."

The moderns have struck out an altogether new path, for their road is both new and broad. What? Were the saints of former ages all mistaken? The martyrs—did they die for a lie and shed their blood for doctrines which criticism explodes? The men of whom the world was not worthy—were they all the dupes of theories which time has disproved? Did nobody know anything till Darwin appeared? Were those who believed, "The things which are seen were not made of things which do appear," downright fools? Is it quite so certain as some think it is that the things which were made grew out of things already existing? Of course I know that nowadays men are so wonderfully intelligent that they have discovered that human life has been "evolved" from lower life. We are the heirs of oysters and the near descendants of apes!

It has taken some time to compass the evolution and yet I will grant that very hard shells are still to be met with and some men are not much above animals—especially such men as can be duped by this hypothesis! Were the old-fashioned Believers all wrong? No, my Brothers and Sisters, they were not wrong—their lives and their deaths prove that they were right! We shall be wrong if we leave the old and tried paths for these new ruts which lead into fathomless bogs of unbelief. It was enough to condemn the idols of Israel that they were new gods, newly set up—and it is enough to condemn the gospels of the hour that they are such as were never heard of in the golden ages of the Church. "The old is

better."

Yet it is strange, but true, that the way to Heaven is in Scripture called the "new" way—the "new and living way"—that is to say, Christ's blood, for when Christ came men began to understand the way of salvation more clearly and it came to them with a freshness of power

which the old ceremonial law knew nothing of. The Incarnate Savior, by His death, has opened a new and living way to the secret pavilion of God! We need nothing newer than the opened way which is made by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ! That Gospel which came in with a dying and risen Savior is the Gospel for us!

Again, we are told in the Bible that it is a "narrow" way. We are expressly told that, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are which go in there: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads unto life." "Oh," says one, "I like a man who is broad in his views." Do you? Possibly you are in the broad road yourself and if so, "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind." How can you, in the teeth of Holy Scripture, admire the broad way? It surely leads to destruction! "I cannot endure narrow views," cries one. You cannot? Then what are you going to do? Do you refuse to follow the narrow way? Yet that way leads to life and though, "few there are that find it," I should have thought it well worth your while to be one of the few!

Of course great thinkers and great doubters shun it because it does not afford room enough for their greatness. But common men should choose it because it leads to the right place. It is curious, is it not, that our Lord Jesus Christ should describe this heavenly way as narrow and yet some who are themselves Christians would, if they could, make it out to be very broad? Everything broad commends itself to their taste. Well, well, however unpopular may be my teaching, I

exhort the young men here to follow the narrow way, to keep close to Christ and the crimson way of His precious blood and to defy all ridicule on that account.

Follow after holiness and let the gaieties and vanities of the world go to those who love them. Keep you to the narrow way of secret prayer and hallowed fellowship with God and let those who want sing-song and theatricals go their own way. It may be you will appear to be losers by quitting the fellowship of the worldly religious—but your loss will be unspeakable gain to you in the long run. Dare to be as the Puritans—conscientious, scrupulous! Venture to follow Christ, even if you go alone, for so shall you go aright.

But I will not keep you much longer. I am still speaking upon this third precept—you are to put your heart into your religion. In no business can a man prosper if he is half-hearted. Religion without heart is a wretched affair. That man who professes to fear the Lord and yet only puts half his heart into his godliness will make a great failure of it. He is a poor, miserable creature who has enough religion to prevent his enjoying sin and not enough to make him enjoy holiness. He that goes right into the heart of godliness will be made happy by it—but no one else. I am speaking to young men and I would drive home this Truth in their case.

They will remember that, when they were boys, they went down to the river for a bath and certain of the lads went paddling in just above their ankles, or their knees. How they shivered with the cold! They did not much appreciate the bath. But one of the boys mounted

the spring-board and leaped right into the water headfirst. I see him now, coming up all glowing and rosy—and I hear his cheery voice, shouting, "Splendid!" Just so. If you go tight into it, you will find true religion to be splendid—but if you go paddling about in the shallows of it, you will become chilled with doubts and fears—and the comfort of it will be far from you. If religion is important, it is all-important! If it is anything, it is everything! If false, leave it altogether—if true, love it altogether!

To show how the joy of religion is proportioned to the degree of it, I sometimes tell a story. It is a parable most instructive and fully to the point—and therefore I cannot help repeating it. It is a story of a man in America who was fond of growing the choicest apples. He asked a neighbor to come up to his orchard and taste his apples which he greatly praised as the best in the world. This high praise he sang many times in his friend's ears, but he could not get him to come to his place to taste the fruit. He asked him again and again, but still the friend did not come. He therefore hinted that there must be a reason for his refusal. "Well," said the other, "the truth is that one day, as I was driving by your orchard, I saw an apple or two that had dropped into the road and I picked one up and tasted it—and it was out of sight the sourest thing in all creation. I am very much obliged to you, but I have had enough for one lifetime."

"Oh," said the owner, "do you know I went 40 miles to buy those sour apples and I planted them all along the hedge, for I thought they would be good for the boys and keep them from picking and stealing? They are a fine sort for that particular purpose. But if you will come and see me, I will lead you inside the orchard, past those first two or three rows and you will find a sweetness and a flavor which will fill your mouth with delight." "I see," said the other, "I see." Do you also see my drift? All round the outside of religion there are sour fruits of prohibitions, rebukes, repentances and self-denials—to keep the hypocrites out! Have you never seen how long they pull their faces, as if their religion did not agree with them? And that is because they have eaten the sour apples on the outskirts.

But oh, if you would come near to the faith and joy which are in Christ Jesus—if you would give all your heart to heavenly pursuits—you would find it quite another thing. Then would your heart "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." The text says, "Guide your heart in the way," that is, get your very soul into the way of salvation. Get every portion of your being under holy influence. Let every fragment of your heart and mind and soul and strength be consecrated. Your heart grows like a luxuriant plant and you must train every tendril, every shoot in the right direction. Nail every branch to the wall and keep it there. Try to guide your heart into the way of Truth, life and holiness—let none of it stray. Then will you be filled with delight. Then will you, in very deed, know that you are saved!

The last word I have to say is, oh, that everyone here present who is not saved would attend to these three precepts now! Hear now! Make up your mind that if there is salvation to be had, you will have it! Be wise at once, lest you be wise too late. Say, "It would be folly

to delay for I may soon be dead and buried. I will have Christ today, my mother's Christ, my father's God." Be wise and cry to God to help you! Cry for the Holy Spirit to enable you to lay hold on eternal life and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for immediate salvation. Trust Him! Remember what I told you of Luther the other night, when he said, "I shall not save myself. Christ is a Savior. It is His business to save."

Put your soul into your Redeemer's hands. He is a Savior and He will save all who trust Him. To trust Jesus is wise. It is wisest of all to do it at once and here. How constantly do I hear of friends suddenly falling dead, or being taken away by unobserved disease! If I were to point tonight to the pews that have been emptied in this place since the first of January, you would be greatly surprised. Your sitting was lately occupied by one who is now dead and this makes the spot a solemn one. Someone else will soon sit in your pew. Be wise! Be wise and seek the Lord at once!

Midsummer has come upon us. Let it not pass away without your soul being brought to Jesus. The hay-time is upon us and Death is sharpening his weapon. I can hear the rink-a-tink of that dread scythe at this very moment! And you, too, will soon be withered like the grass which has fallen before the mower. Therefore now, even now, seek my Savior! I implore you, seek Him without further delay! I wish that I were able to speak to you with a clear and powerful voice which would keep pace with my heart—but as I cannot do so, I do my best and use what voice I have. I would do anything to draw you to the Lord Jesus who is the Way of Life!

We shall soon stand at God's great judgment seat and I shall have to answer for my preaching. Therefore I entreat you to be wise. Why should I give my account with grief? "Seek you the Lord while He may be found! Call you upon Him while He is near." May the Lord lead you to do so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON— Proverbs 23:9-35 HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—331, 545, 518.